

95,000 more people in Far North after Aquis completed: report

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RAPID GROWTH: The proposed \$8.15 billion Aquis resort could have a dramatic impact on the local population. *Source:* Supplied

THE population of Cairns could explode by 95,000 after the \$8.15 billion Aquis integrated resort is built in 2022, according to new estimates.

Consultants have been instructed by the state's co-ordinator-general to reassess population projections as part of the Aquis environmental impact statement (EIS).

They predict the city could grow by 95,000 people above current estimates from 170,535 today to 265,393 in eight years. By 2036 there could be nearly 340,000 people in the city, double that of today.

In a 512-page supplementary report, the Flanagan Consulting Group, Deloitte-Access Economics and the Cairns Regional Council, have re-estimated growth using a higher dependency rate, which adds the partners and families of people who come to Cairns to build and operate Aquis at Yorkeys Knob.

“The revised forecast, with a variable dependency rate, reveals a population increase of an additional 94,875 persons ... resulting in a 2036 population of 338,958 persons compared to the ‘business as usual’ (without Aquis) forecast of 244,083 persons,” Flanagan’s managing director Pat Flanagan said in the report.

“The forecast population growth will result in a demand for 78,000 dwellings (47,000 units, 31,000 detached dwellings) by 2036,” he said.

“The construction of these dwellings is estimated to generate \$1.24 billion in infrastructure contributions to Cairns Regional Council at current rates.”

Mr Flanagan said the estimated residential population of 244,083 by 2036 would be more likely reached 14 years earlier in 2022 after Aquis was completed.

“It is important for the infrastructure and service providers to plan for threshold populations (say 300,000 persons),” he said.

“The concern for Aquis is that underestimating population growth may result in infrastructure or community services shortfalls which will make relocating to Cairns less attractive, resulting in difficulties for recruitment of operational workforce and likely competition for existing staff with consequential crowding out effects which are the identified negative economic impacts that need to be avoided.”

In the council's response to the EIS, it said it was concerned that a low dependency rate "would understate long- term population growth and consequential housing, infrastructure and services demand".

Herron Todd White research director Rick Carr said the figures were realistic.

At the lower end of the scale was a population boost of about 66,000, calculated by the state's Office of Economic and Statistical Research, while the Aquis figures of 94,875 were at the top end, he said.

Aquis Aware spokesman Denis Walls. Picture: Stewart McLean *Source: News Corp Australia*

Aquis Aware spokesman Denis Walls said there were significant differences in population projections and where and how the thousands of extra people coming to the city would be housed.

"The actual population increase is large and in the order of 95,000 but cannot be accurately predicted at this time," he said.

"Leaving this detailed work to the strategic growth management plan is unacceptable."